

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for an employer of at least one employee to control health care costs comprising the steps of offering an employee the choice between (a) a plan or account sponsored by the employer that reimburses for eligible health care expenses and (b) the employer's other health care coverage, and conditioning the availability of said plan or account on the employee declining at least in part said employer's other health care coverage for at least one of himself and another individual eligible to participate under said employer's other health care coverage and electing coverage for at least one of himself and said other eligible individual under an alternate health care plan.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein said other eligible individual comprises at least one of the employee's spouse, the employee's children, the employee's dependents and the employee's domestic partner.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual and the alternate health care plan is sponsored by at least one of an employer of the employee's spouse, an employer of another family member of the employee and an employer of a domestic partner of the employee.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual and the alternate health care plan is sponsored by at least one of the employee's former employer, a former employer of the employee's spouse, a former employer of another

family member of the employee and a former employer of a domestic partner of the employee.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual and said alternate health care plan is at least one of a government plan, a student plan and private insurance.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said government plan comprises at least one of Medicare and Champus.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein said plan or account is used to reimburse eligible health care expenses consisting of deductibles, co-payments and coinsurance amounts required by said alternate health care plan.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual, and said plan or account is used to reimburse eligible expenses not covered under said alternate health care plan.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said employer's other health care coverage includes a dental care plan and the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual except the dental care plan.

10. The method of claim 8 wherein said plan or account is used to reimburse eligible expenses not covered under said alternate health care plan and eligible expenses related to dental care not covered by the dental care plan.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein said employer's other health care coverage includes a vision care plan and the employee declines all of said employer's other health care coverage for himself and said other eligible individual except the vision care plan.
12. The method of claim 10 wherein said plan or account is used to reimburse eligible expenses not covered under said alternate health care plan and eligible expenses related to vision care not covered by the vision care plan.
13. The method of claim 1 wherein said employer's other health care coverage includes a health care flexible spending account.
14. The method of claim 1 wherein reimbursement claims under said plan or account are wholly funded by the employer.
15. The method of claim 1 wherein reimbursement claims under said plan or account are funded by the employer and the employee's pre-tax-contributions.
16. The method of claim 1 wherein reimbursement claims under said plan or account are paid by at least one of the employer, an insurance policy and a trust.
17. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of imposing an annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said plan or account.
18. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said plan or account separately as to one or more of the employee and said other eligible individual under said plan or account.

19. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said plan or account depending upon the extent to which the employee foregoes coverage available under said employer's other health care coverage.

20. The method of claim 1 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said plan or account depending upon other criteria established by the employer.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein said other criteria include at least one of the employee's family status and the employee's health habits.

22. A method of reducing an employer's health care costs comprising the steps of providing an employee with the option to elect between an employer sponsored health care expense reimbursement plan or account and the employer's other sponsored health care coverage, conditioning the availability of said reimbursement plan or account on the employee declining said employer's other sponsored health care coverage and electing coverage under an alternate health care plan, and reimbursing the employee for eligible health care expenses not reimbursed under said alternate health care plan.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein said alternate health care plan is at least one of another employer's health care plan, government plan, student plan and private insurance plan.

24. The method of claim 22 wherein the employee elects said reimbursement plan or account and said alternate health care plan is sponsored by at least one of an

employer of the employee's spouse, an employer of another family member of the employee and an employer of a domestic partner of the employee.

25. The method of claim 22 wherein the employee elects said reimbursement plan or account and said alternate health care plan is sponsored by at least one of the employee's former employer, a former employer of the employee's spouse, a former employer of another family member of the employee and a former employer of a domestic partner of the employee.

26. The method of claim 22 wherein said reimbursement plan or account is used to reimburse eligible health care expenses consisting of deductibles, co-payments and coinsurance amounts required by said alternate health care plan.

27. The method of claim 22 wherein reimbursement claims under said reimbursement plan or account are wholly funded by the employer.

28. The method of claim 22 wherein reimbursement claims under said reimbursement plan or account are funded by the employer and the employee's pre-tax contributions.

29. The method of claim 22 wherein reimbursement claims under said reimbursement plan or account are paid by at least one of the employer, a trust and an insurance policy.

30. The method of claim 22 comprising the further step of imposing an annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said reimbursement plan or account.

31. The method of claim 22 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said reimbursement plan or account separately as to one or more of the employee and said other eligible individual under said reimbursement plan or account.

32. The method of claim 22 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said reimbursement plan or account depending upon the extent to which the employee foregoes coverage available under said employer's other health care coverage.

33. The method of claim 22 comprising the further step of varying the imposed annual limit on the amount of eligible health care expenses reimbursable under said reimbursement plan or account depending upon other criteria established by the employer.

34. The method of claim 33 wherein said other criteria include at least one of the employee's family status and the employee's health habits.

35. The method of claim 22 wherein the election of and reimbursement of claims under said reimbursement plan or account are administered by at least one of the employer, an insurance company and an outside third party administrator.

36. An employee health care administration system comprising means for storing the employee's election of coverage under a plan or account sponsored by an employer that reimburses eligible health care expenses, a database for storing a record of the employee's activity under the plan or account, means for storing the plan or account administration rules including an administrative rule defining at least one of eligible reimbursable expenses, reimbursement timing and annual reimbursement

limits, and means responsive to the plan or account administration rules for processing the employee's reimbursement claims under the plan or account to the exclusion of the employee's reimbursement claims under at least some of the employer's other health care coverage for at least one of the employee and the employee's family.

37. The system of claim 36 wherein the health care administration system includes means for generating reimbursement checks and EOBs.